

## A vote for Europe? The 2019 EP elections from the voters' perspective

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**Working Paper**

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## **A Vote for Europe? The 2019 EP Elections from the Voters' Perspective**

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**A Vote for Europe?**

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Discussion Paper ZZ 2020-601

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Abstract

**A Vote for Europe?**  
**The 2019 EP Election from the Voters' Perspective**

by  
**Edgar Grande and Guillem Vidal**

In this paper we analyze the 2019 EP elections from the voters' perspective. It is based on a novel post-electoral survey covering five North West European countries: Austria, Germany, France, Sweden and the UK. In particular we address the following questions: How important were the lead candidates in the election campaign? Which issues were most important for voters? How do these issues relate to voters' political preferences and ideological orientations? Our findings show that the *Spitzenkandidaten* process failed to effectively connect European party groups with their voters. Moreover, our analysis reveals that voters had clear issue priorities, which reflected, to a considerable extent, the new cleavage structure which has been shaping party competition in North West European countries in the last two decades.

Keywords: European Union, EP elections, lead candidates, public opinion, cleavages

## **Introduction: The EP election 2019 in public debates**

In public debates after election day(s), many commentators interpreted the outcomes of the European Parliamentary elections in May 2019 as a vote for Europe in general and as confirming the importance of lead candidates, the so-called *Spitzenkandidaten* in particular. Several factors contributed to this positive assessment: turnout increased by 8 per cent from 42.6 to 50.6 per cent; the electoral performance of radical populist right and Eurosceptic parties was less impressive than expected (despite successes in major countries such as France, Italy and the UK); and rather, the pro-European Liberal and Green Parties were considered the ‘winners’ of this election. Even though the main parties of the moderate right and left – the European Peoples Party (EPP) and the Social Democrats (more precisely, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Social Democrats; S&D) – lost their dominant position, the new European Parliament has a clear pro-European majority. According to the predominant view, the EU’s multiple crises – namely, the Brexit crisis, the Eurozone crisis and the refugee crisis – mobilized new support for Europe among citizens, rather than intensifying existing divides over European integration. Contrary to previous elections – the 2014 elections in particular – the EP elections in 2019 seemed to be good news for the European integration project. Against this background, the European Council’s refusal to nominate one of the lead candidates of the European party groups as president of the European Commission has been criticized as a major setback for establishing a successful electoral democracy in the EU.

Are these positive assessments justified? Were the results of the EP elections in May 2019 really a vote for Europe and for the *Spitzenkandidaten*? In the following, we present the results of a representative cross-national online survey of voters which was conducted on behalf of our DFG-project “Conflict structuring in European Elections” with financial support from the WZB.<sup>1</sup> The survey covers

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<sup>1</sup> The project is directed by Edgar Grande and Daniela Braun at the LMU Munich and the WZB Berlin. It has been funded by the German Research Council since 2016.

five North West European countries: Austria, France, Germany, Sweden and the UK.<sup>2</sup> Comparative studies have shown that these countries are representative for the ‘macro region’ of North Western Europe (see Kriesi 2016; Hutter and Kriesi 2019). Empirical research on these countries has provided important insights into the restructuring of political conflict in Western Europe (Kriesi et al. 2008; 2012) and into the politicization of the European integration process (Hutter, Grande, and Kriesi 2016). We should be cautious with generalizations for Eastern and Southern Europe. Since our sample includes core countries of the EU such as France and Germany, our findings should nevertheless be of more general interest for scholars of European politics and European integration.

In this article, we focus our presentation of results on the importance of candidates and issues in the 2019 EP elections. In particular, we address the following questions: How important were the lead candidates in the election campaign? Which issues were most important for voters? How do these issues relate to voters’ political preferences and ideological orientations? Our findings suggest that lead candidates failed to establish an effective electoral connection between voters and European party groups. Rather, new cleavage issues were of high importance for voters.

### **Lead candidates and the electoral connection between voters and parties**

The nomination of lead candidates by the European party groups in the 2014 EP elections has been considered a major ‘democratic innovation’ in the EU’s political system (Hobolt 2014; Christiansen 2016). The personalization of EP election campaigns is expected to have several positive effects: it should mobilize European citizens, thus increasing turnout; it should intensify the link between parties and voters by giving European party groups a face; and, not least, the ap-

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<sup>2</sup> Technical details of the survey can be found in section A.1 in the appendix.

pointment of a successful lead candidate as president of the European Commission should strengthen the democratic legitimacy of supranational institutions. However, research on the 2014 elections has shown that the first attempt to boost electoral democracy by nominating lead candidates did not live up to expectations. Although the European Council appointed the lead candidate of the largest party group as Commission president, the *Spitzenkandidaten* process only had a minor effect on voter mobilization (Schmitt, Hobolt, and Popa 2015). Outside their respective countries of origin, the public visibility of lead candidates was low, and national parties made little efforts to emphasize these candidates in their manifestos and public communications (see, e.g., Schmitt, Hobolt, and Popa 2015; Braun and Popa 2018; Braun and Schwarzbözl 2019). In sum, this research shows that parties, for good reasons, hardly made use of the new opportunities to connect to their voters.

Was the EP election campaign in 2019 different in this regard? Was the second attempt to nominate lead candidates more successful? The results of our survey shed new light on the role of lead candidates in EP election campaigns. They address the relevance of these candidates from the voters' perspective, rather than from that of parties. In our survey, we asked respondents to identify the six official lead candidates along with the European party group responsible for their nomination. If voters were unable to establish a relationship between candidates and parties, then these candidates would not have connected voters to their parties.



*Table 1. The role of lead candidates*

Candidates	Austria	Germany	France	UK	Sweden	Average
Manfred WEBER	30.31	33.69	4.8	2.68	7.23	15.74
Frans TIMMERMANS	21.89	28.05	2.44	1.99	10.92	13.06
Ska KELLER	10.66	21.49	3.5	2.07	8	9.14
Margrethe VESTAGER	10.27	20.88	3.01	1.76	7.54	8.69
Nico CUÉ	7.34	10.9	3.5	2.38	7.08	6.24
Jan ZAHRADIL	6.45	10.52	1.87	2.07	6.77	5.54
<i>Average</i>	14.49	20.92	3.19	2.16	7.92	-

*Note:* In each country we asked the following question ‘For each of the following candidates for President of the next European Commission, can you tell me which European party group supports their nomination?’ The table shows the percentage of correct answers.

The results shown in *Table 1* reveal that lead candidates’ performance was again disappointing in this regard. On average, only 15 per cent of voters were able to correctly identify Manfred Weber, the lead candidate of the European People’s Party (EPP), with his European party group. The other candidates’ values are even lower. For the candidate of the second major party family (S&D), the Dutch Social Democrat Frans Timmermans, the results show an average of 13 per cent; and for the candidate of the Liberals (ALDE), Margrethe Verstager, the average value was 9 per cent.<sup>3</sup>

Our data also show considerable variation across countries. Regardless of party family, the relevance of lead candidates was strongest in Germany, where about 20 per cent of voters were able to correctly identify the lead candidates. This cannot be attributed directly to the German lead candidate Manfred Weber. His results do not stand out in his ‘home country’ – only one-third of German voters correctly identified him with his European party group. The results for the other

<sup>3</sup> The Liberal party group (ALDE) nominated a team of candidates. We included the most prominent member of this team, Margrethe Verstager, in our survey.

candidates indicate that the lead candidates in general received more attention in Germany.

Most importantly, our data reveal that lead candidates had serious difficulties to connect to voters in three of the five countries, with average values clearly below 10 per cent. Such a poor result should have been expected for the UK, which was already an exceptional case in 2014. However, the results for France are similarly disappointing. On average, only 3 per cent of French voters correctly identified the candidates, and less than 5 per cent were able to identify the alleged ‘winner’ of the electoral competition, Manfred Weber. In Sweden, the average value was about 8 per cent, and the individual value for Manfred Weber (7.23) was even below average.

These results change only slightly if we focus on the lead candidates of the four major party groups and exclude the radical left and radical right candidates. In Germany, the average value increases from 21 to 25 per cent; in Austria, there is an increase from 15 to 18 per cent. However, the average values for the other three countries do not change at all. Even if we split the sample between those who voted for the party of the respective candidate and those who did not, as shown by *Table A.3* in the appendix, the results remain disappointing for the *Spitzenkandidaten* process. In Germany, among the voters of the Christian Democratic parties CSU and CDU, 58 per cent could not correctly identify Weber as the lead candidate of the EPP. Most strikingly, more than 90 per cent of moderate right voters in France (voters of LR) and in Sweden (voters of the Moderates or Christian Democrats) could not place Weber as the EPP’s *Spitzenkandidat*. Though Weber is used here as the main example, the same findings could be drawn from the other candidates, with even more disappointing results.

These results corroborate several findings for the role of the lead candidates in the EP election campaign in 2014. First, countries had large differences in their public awareness of *Spitzenkandidaten* (Hobolt 2014). The greatest awareness was found in German-speaking countries, and it was lowest in the UK (Schulze 2016;

Shackleton 2017); additionally, the awareness of the *Spitzenkandidaten* was greatest in their own countries (Hobolt 2014). Second, citizens' knowledge of individual candidates was poor, and the lead candidates overall had limited name recognition (van der Brug, Gattermann, and de Vreese 2016; Schmitt, Hobolt, and Popa 2015).

Evidently, the EP election campaign in 2019 was not different in this regard. Across the five countries covered by our study, only a small percentage of voters were actually able to correctly identify the candidates along with the European party group they were supposed to 'lead' and represent. In some major countries, most importantly in France, lead candidates were unable to connect to voters. Our findings suggest that the democratic legitimacy of these candidates was in fact low – if voters legitimized them at all. Their capability to provide their European party groups with a democratic mandate for their nomination in subsequent negotiations among and within European institutions was very limited. In a nutshell, in 2019, the lead candidates failed during the election campaign – and not in post-electoral negotiations.

### **Did voters care about Europe? The most important issues for voters in the 2019 EP election**

If voters did not care about the lead candidates, did they care about issues? And if so, which issues were most important for voters during this election campaign? The literature on party competition assumes that issues play a crucial role in election campaigns. Parties seek a competitive advantage by either selectively emphasizing specific issues, as assumed by saliency theories of issue voting (see Robertson 1976; Budge and Farlie 1983), or by strategically positioning themselves towards the most relevant issues, as assumed by spatial theories of party competition (see Downs 1957). According to this literature, issue competition can and should be focused on a limited set of issues of high priority for vot-

ers. A debate exists as to whether issue-oriented party competition is still rooted in a limited number of theoretically justified cleavages or whether these cleavages have given way to a more fluid system of issue competition (see Kriesi et al. 2008; 2012; Hooghe and Marks 2018; Green-Pedersen 2019). In any case, issue competition tends to become ineffective if voter priorities are diffuse and their positions are blurred.

European elections provide some additional challenges for parties in this regard. One of the questions confronting parties is whether they should emphasize European issues or stay with the domestic issues with which they are associated. The literature shows that mainstream parties have quite consistently and successfully tried to avoid European issues in most EP elections (van der Eijk and Franklin 1996). The salience of European issues has been increasing in more recent elections, but this does not indicate a shift of emphasis from the national to the European level. Meanwhile, this also reflects the fact that European issues have become more visible and politicizing in national elections (Hutter and Grande 2014; Hobolt and de Vries 2015). De Vreese and van der Brug (2016, 282) summarize this literature by concluding that ‘real European policies, such as the austerity measures imposed on southern European countries, are barely mentioned during election campaigns. Election mandates for those policies can only materialize to the extent that the behaviour of both EP parties and voters is shaped by the same ideological left/right dimension’.

How relevant were European issues for voters in the 2019 EP election? And how were these issues integrated in their ideological orientations? The results of our survey contribute to answering these questions. *Table 2* presents the results for the ‘most important issues’ question in our questionnaire. Respondents were asked to identify the two most important issues presently facing the European

Union from an extended list of issues.<sup>4</sup> Four findings are of particularly important. First, our data shows that two issues clearly stood out: immigration and climate change. Immigration was one of the two most important issues in each of the five countries for more than 20 per cent of the respondents. Climate change was among the two most important issues in four of the five countries. Only in the UK was terrorism mentioned as a more important problem than climate change, which was third.

Second, European issues were important for voters in the 2019 EP elections. In our questionnaire, we included four issues related to the EU and European integration: on the single currency, the power and competences of EU institutions, on European values and identity, and on the role of the EU in the international scene. While most policy issues also have a European dimension, these issues are exclusively related to European institutions and the European integration process. The individual European issues were clearly outperformed by the two most important policy issues. Most remarkable are the low values for the single currency, the euro. It is hardly mentioned as an important issue, regardless of a country's membership in the Eurozone. However, two European issues gained considerable importance, namely the role of the EU in the international scene and European values and identity. These issues were mentioned more frequently than most of the other policy issues. These values suggest that voters really cared about the state of the EU and considered European issues as important in this election. The aggregate values for the four European issues support this interpretation. The aggregate value was 24.96% in Germany, 24.01% in Austria, 22.21% in France and even 29.98% in the UK. Sweden deviated from this pattern with an aggregate value of 10.11%.

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<sup>4</sup> This question is distinct from the 'most important issues' question in the European Election Study (EES) because it asks for challenges facing the EU, rather than the respondent's country, and by allowing two issues to be mentioned, instead of one.

*Table 2.* The issue priorities of voters: What are the two most important issues currently facing the European Union?

Issues	Austria	Germany	France	UK	Sweden
The single currency, the Euro	2.59	2.79	3.06	5.65	1.08
The power and competences of EU institutions	5.46	5.19	6.32	8.65	2.21
European values and identity	7.98	7.48	4.97	7.15	3.41
The role of the EU in the international scene	7.98	9.5	7.86	8.53	3.41
Immigration	<b>22.32</b>	<b>22.63</b>	<b>22.13</b>	<b>21.56</b>	<b>24.77</b>
The fight against climate change	<b>22.64</b>	<b>23.24</b>	<b>14.63</b>	10.99	<b>25.04</b>
Economic growth	3.35	3.17	7.17	8.19	5.73
Inflation and purchasing power	3.07	1.98	7.21	2.77	1.16
Unemployment	4.02	2.67	5.42	4.04	2.59
Crime	4.44	4.31	1.02	2.5	10.33
Terrorism	6.16	7.52	8.6	<b>13.03</b>	9.48
Agriculture	1.47	.95	3.1	.69	2.28
The future of pensions	3.64	3.78	2.49	1.19	1.47
The food safety	1.85	1.34	1.39	1.46	1.86
The energy	1.92	2.48	3.71	1.58	3.06
Misc.	1.12	0.95	0.94	2.04	2.13
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100

*Note:* Numbers indicate the percentage of how often each issue was selected for each country. Bold numbers indicate the most important issues per country.

The importance of European issues becomes even more evident when compared with economic issues. Our questionnaire included three economic issues, namely unemployment, economic growth and inflation. These issues were considered

minor problems for the European Union at the time of the election. Economic issues in sum were less important for voters in Austria (10.44%), Sweden (9.48%) and in Germany (7.82%). Aggregate values of economic issues are highest in France with 19.8% and in the UK with 15%. Even including the single currency in this category of economic issues, this picture does not dramatically change.

Third, this pattern is quite consistent across countries. In the five North Western European countries covered by our study, voters were mostly concerned about the same problems, and more or less to the same extent. This is particularly the case in Austria, France and Germany but also in Sweden. Even the UK was not as different as we would have expected against the background of domestic Brexit controversies. Our findings support the conclusions of Russo et al. (2019, 11) that the 2019 EP elections, ‘perhaps for the first time, show some genuine issue content that is readable across multiple countries’.

Fourth, the pattern of issues emphasized by voters seems to reflect the recent transformation of cleavage structures in Western Europe. Among the most important issues for voters in this EP election, those constituting the new ‘demarcation–integration’ (Kriesi et al. 2008; 2012) or ‘transnationalism’ cleavage (Hooghe and Marks 2018) played an important role. This applies particularly for immigration and European integration issues. These ‘twin issues’ have been the main drivers of transformative change in Western European national electoral arenas since the 1990s, and voters attributed high importance to them in the 2019 EP election contest as well. The aggregate share of these issues was 46.33% in Austria, 47.59% in Germany, 44.34% in France, 51.54% in the UK and 35.88% in Sweden.

How does climate change fit into this picture? Conflicts over environmental issues have not been among the constitutive issues of the new ‘transnationalism’ cleavage, but they may have a strong transnational dimension. Global environmental issues such as climate change have been responsible for the emergence of ‘world risk society’ (Beck 2009; 2016) and of new institutional frameworks of

global governance. Hence, there are good theoretical reasons to subsume conflicts over climate change under the new ‘transnationalism’ cleavage. Moreover, positive attitudes towards environmental issues have been an integral part of green, alternative and libertarian values. Accordingly, environmental issues have been included in the category of ‘new cultural’ issues in the most recent study by Hutter and Kriesi (2019). However, recent domestic political conflicts, particularly the *gilet jaunes* movement in France, have also revealed a strong economic dimension of such conflicts. As a result, they may also be embedded into the socio-economic cleavage. In our view, how conflicts over climate change are integrated into the existing conflict structure is an empirical question. This will very much depend on the system of political opposition between competing parties, on the one hand, and the social groups constituted by these conflicts, on the other hand.

### **The structure of voters’ issue positions in the 2019 EP elections**

Having shown that voters had clear issue priorities, we now turn to their positions on these issues. Which positions did voters take on the most important issues? And, most importantly, were their positions meaningfully structured across a larger number of issues? In order to identify the voters’ issue positions, we asked them to position themselves on a scale from 0 to 10 on a broad range of issues. Among them were several European issues, but the list also includes questions on welfare (‘redistribution’), immigration, the environment and cultural liberalism (‘homosexual rights’). The full list of questions and their exact wording are documented in *Table A.1* in the Appendix.

Although this list of questions is not fully identical to those issues included in our ‘most important issues’ question, it includes all issues which are considered constitutive for both the old socio-economic cleavage and the new ‘demarcation–integration’ divide. Are voter positions on these ‘cleavage issues’ structured



accordingly? Do they reflect the divides discussed in the literature on conflict structuring in Europe? And can we find the same structure in every country covered by our survey?

*Table 3.* The structure of voters' issue positions

Issue	Factor 1: <i>EU-Authority</i>	Factor 2: <i>Demarcation- Integration</i>	Factor 3: <i>New Socio- Ecological</i>	Uniqueness
European Unification		0.820		0.290
EU authority over budget	0.745			0.370
EU strictness on rule violation	0.679			0.498
EU tax on its own	0.648			0.505
EU security and defence	0.713			0.479
EU minimum wage			0.555	0.526
EU should dissolve		0.750		0.359
Redistribution			0.814	0.336
Homosexual rights				0.587
Immigration		0.744		0.418
Environment			0.675	0.512

*Note:* Blanks represent  $\text{abs}(\text{loading}) < .5$ . Factors with  $\text{Eigenvalue} > 1$ . Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy: .76. Rotated factor loadings (pattern matrix) and unique variances. Phrasing of the questions for each variable can be found in section A.2 in the appendix, table A.2.

We used factor analysis to answer these questions. Our analysis was based on the assumption that issues constituting a cleavage should load on the same factor. The results of our analysis are shown in *Table 3*. The analysis identified three factors. The first factor includes four EU specific issues, among them EU authority over national budgets and EU strictness on rule violations. Basically, these issues are about the EU's authority vis-à-vis member states. We may interpret this as an *EU authority dimension*, which is somewhat similar to the 'Europeanist camp' identified by Maag and Kriesi (2016, 221) in their analysis of European

integration debates. The second factor includes two EU issues but also immigration. Why are these issues grouped together? The two EU issues address general orientations towards the European integration process, i.e. fundamental questions of ‘integration vs. demarcation’. In these questions, we asked whether ‘European integration has gone too far’ and whether ‘The European Union should dissolve’. As the values for both questions were very positive, we may interpret these two issues as representing the ‘Eurosceptic camp’ in conflicts over Europe. These two issues were combined with very negative positions on immigration, which suggests that the second factor represents the cultural-identitarian core of the new *demarcation–integration cleavage*. The third factor includes two socio-economic policy issues, namely ‘European minimum wage’, as a proxy for a ‘social Europe’, and ‘redistribution’. Both issues stand more generally for pro-welfare issues. It seems as if this factor represents a *socio-economic dimension* of conflict. Interestingly, environmental issues are also positively correlated with this factor. Therefore, it would be misleading to equate this factor with the ‘old’ socio-economic divide. Instead, this structure of voter preferences signifies a transformation of the socio-economic cleavage into something we may tentatively label a new ‘socio-ecological divide’.

How robust is this constellation of factors across countries? We observed some cross-national variation in our analysis of issue priorities. For example, economic issues were much more important for French voters, while European issues were of minor relevance for Swedish voters. Hence, our factor analysis may mask differences between countries. In order to control this, we calculated factor analyses for each country separately. The results (shown in *Tables A.4–8* in the Appendix) provide strong support for our previous analysis. Most importantly, we found the same three factors in every country, with the same minor modifications. First, the Europeanists also share positive opinions about a European minimum wage in all countries (except Germany). Second, the demarcation–integration factor includes negative opinions towards homosexual rights in all

countries, which indicates that this factor even more markedly represents the new cleavage than suggested by our aggregate-level analysis. Third, the environmental issue loads more or less to the same extent on the third factor in every country, regardless of the relative importance of economic issues. This factor is also positively correlated with homosexual rights, which reaffirms our hunch regarding the transformation of the old socio-economic divide.

Taken together, our findings show that voters in the 2019 EP elections had clear issue priorities and that their positions on these issues, to a considerable extent, reflected the new cleavage structure, which has been shaping party competition in North Western European countries in the last two decades.

### **The self-placement of voters in the ideological space**

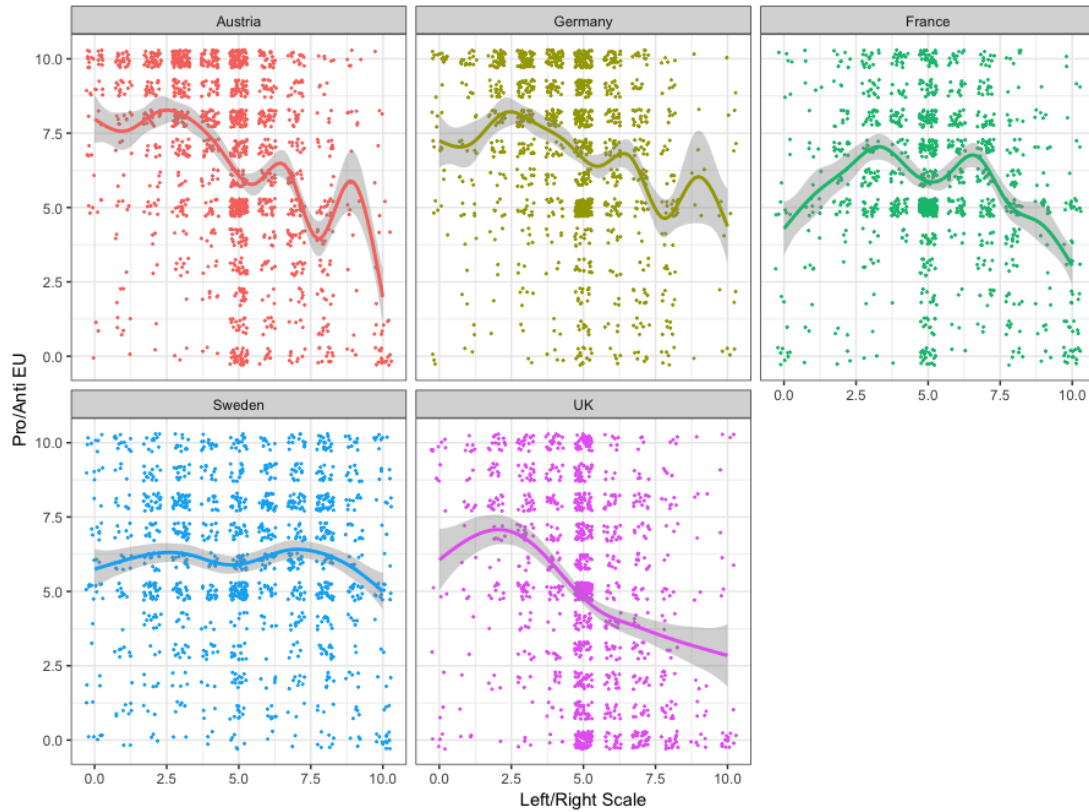
If our assumption holds that voters' issue priorities are shaped by fundamental political divides, then these divides should also correspond to voters' general political orientations. How do voters ideologically position themselves? And how do their issue positions correspond with their general ideological orientations? Our questionnaire included two questions which allowed these questions to be answered. First, we asked respondents to place themselves on the common political left-right scale. Although this scale assumes a comprehensive coverage of issues, it is based on socio-economic conflicts (see, e.g., Laver and Budge 1992). We therefore took it as a proxy for socio-economic divides. Since our previous results suggest that voters in the 2019 EP elections were also divided by a new 'demarcation-integration' cleavage, we used a second question to examine the relevance of this divide for voters' political self-placement. More precisely, the respondents were asked about their general orientation towards European integration. In the following, we take their placement on a 'pro-/anti-EU' scale as indicator for their transnational orientation. The literature on the restructuring of political conflict in Western Europe assumes that these two dimensions con-

stitute a two-dimensional political space and that voters' placement in this two-dimensional space is structured in a specific way (see Kriesi et al. 2008; 2012).

In *Figure 1*, we show the correlation between the two dimensions for each country. Our analysis reveals some variation across countries. Basically, we can identify three patterns of self-placements. In Sweden, voters' self-placement in the two-dimensional space was dominated by the left-right divide. Their positions towards the EU were not systematically affected by their left-right orientations. This is in clear contrast to the other four countries, in which left and right orientations and pro-/anti-EU positions were associated in specific ways. The prevailing pattern was the one we observed in Austria, the UK and Germany. In these countries, most pronounced in Austria, left orientations corresponded with a pro-EU position, and a right placement clearly corresponded with an anti-EU position. The result is a GAL-TAN divide, as Hooghe and Marks identified in their work on the ideological profiles of political parties towards European integration in the early 2000s (see, e.g., Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002). This divide is constituted by political oppositions between green, alternative and libertarian parties and ideological positions, on the one hand, and traditional, authoritarian and nationalist orientations, on the other hand. The GAL pole in this system of oppositions is represented by the New Left and Green parties, while the TAN pole is most successfully represented by radical right populist parties. The self-placement of voters in Austria, the UK and Germany is clearly shaped by this system of political opposition.

A modification of the GAL-TAN divide can be found in countries with a strong radical left. As shown by Hix and Lord (1997), the radical left shares with the radical and extreme right their opposition towards the EU and the European integration process. While voters of the radical left and radical right parties occupy different positions on socio-economic issues, the placement of these voters in the two-dimensional space takes the shape of an inverted U curve. In our analysis, the self-placement of voters in France shows this pattern of political conflict.

**Figure 1.** Self-placement of voters on Pro/Anti EU versus Left/Right scales per country

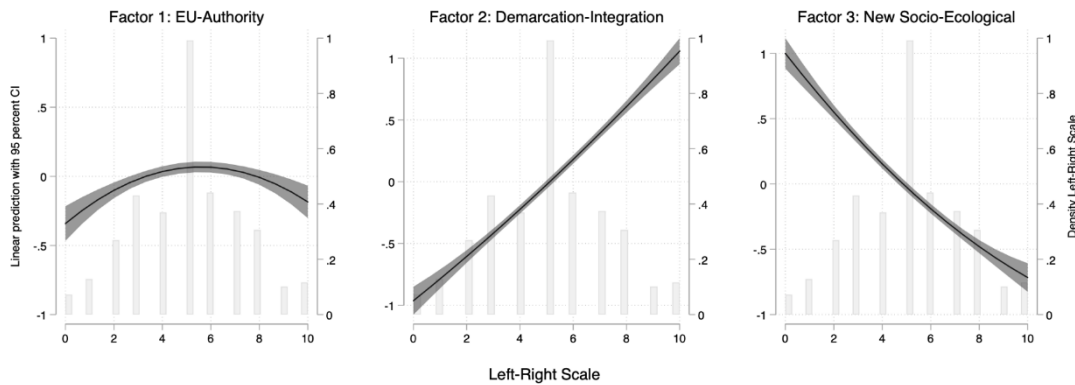


*Note:* This plot shows the correlation between individuals' position on the left-right scale and pro/anti-EU scale. Dots represent individuals in each square (jittered). Solid lines are local regressions with 95% C.I. Exact wording of the questions can be found in section A.2 in the appendix, in table A.2.

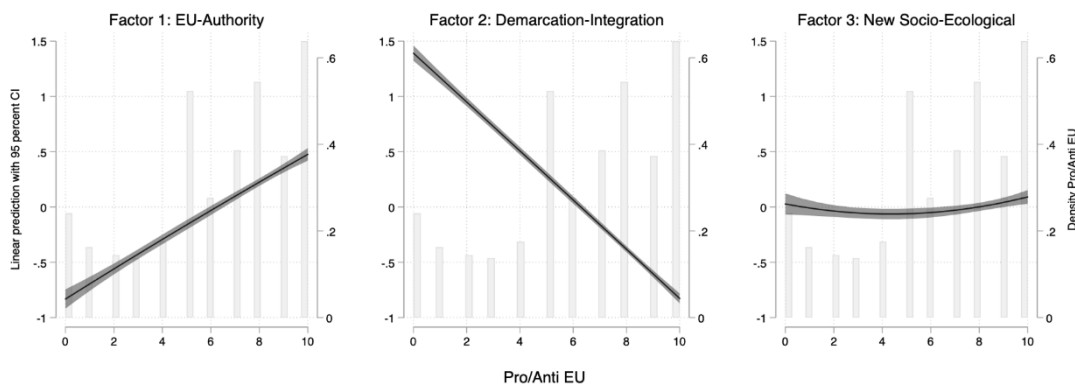
How do these ideological self-placements relate to voters' positions on their most important issues, as we identified above? In the last step, we correlated the self-placement of voters with the factor loadings, which we present in *Table 3*. The results for each of the three factors are shown separately for left and right orientations (*Figure 2a*) and for pro-/anti-EU orientations (*Figure 2b*). They clearly confirm the findings of our previous analysis. Most importantly, our demarcation-integration factor is correlated with both left-right and pro-/anti-EU positions in the expected way.

More specifically, the extremes on the left-right scale tended to be negatively correlated with the EU-authority factor, though for different reasons:

*Figure 2a.* Issue priorities and political self-placement — Left-Right on factor loadings



*Figure 2b.* Pro/Anti EU on factor loadings



*Note:* Dark lines illustrate the predicted probabilities of left-right scale (figure 2a) and pro/anti-EU scale (figure 2b) on the factor loadings in Table 3. Vertical lines illustrate the density of the scales for each category. Wording on the questions can be found in section A.2 in the Appendix.

while the left is strongly opposed to strengthening security and defence in the EU, the right is much less supportive of granting the EU authority over national budgets. Yet, this dimension is positively correlated with being pro-EU in general. The integration–demarcation factor displays the clearest polarization structure: opposition to immigration aligns with opposition to the EU as a polity, thus aligning the right with anti-EU stands. Finally, the new socio-ecological factor shows a very clear divide between the left and the right: the left tends to favour redistribution, a European minimum wage and environmental protection,

whereas the right shows clear opposition to each of these issues. However, it is important to note that this factor is uncorrelated with support for the EU.

In sum, the analysis confirms our expectation that voters' issue priorities and preferences in the EP elections systematically corresponded to their general ideological orientations. Most importantly, these ideological orientations reflect the cleavage structures identified above, which have been characteristic for the system of political oppositions in the EU party system (Hix and Lord 1997; Hix and Høyland 2011).

## Conclusions

Our survey results provide interesting new insights into the demand side of electoral competition in the EU. Three findings are particularly important. First, our findings show that the latest EP elections were not a vote for the *Spitzenkandidaten*. In the 2019 EP election campaign, European party groups were unable to establish an effective electoral connection with their voters via the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Second, our analysis shows that European voters had clear issue priorities and positions. These issue preferences were quite similar across the countries covered by our survey. Our analysis of the demand side of European elections suggests that there would have been considerable potential for transnational political campaigns in the 2019 EP elections. As a next step, it will be important to determine whether and how political parties were able and willing to exploit this potential in these elections, i.e. whether supply actually met this demand. Third, and most importantly, voters' issue preferences reflect the new structure of political divides as we know it from national elections in West European countries, and these preferences evidently correspond with their more general ideological orientations. Our analysis suggests that the demand side of the EP elections in 2019 was shaped considerably by the new 'demarcation-

integration' or 'transnationalism' cleavage. This was not only due to the importance of European issues in the EP elections; even more so, it was the result of the increasing relevance of immigration issues for European voters. It will be a matter of further analyses to explore the consequences of this structuring of issue preferences for voting behaviour.

Against this background, we should be cautious in interpreting the election results as an unqualified vote for Europe. The higher importance of European issues for voters in the 2019 EP elections should not be interpreted as a return to the permissive consensus of the pre-Maastricht decades in the 2019 EP elections. Our analysis suggests that increasing interest in European issues could also be the result of new political divides and controversies in the electorate. Hence, the consequences of higher public attention for Europe for the future direction of the European integration process could be more ambiguous than assumed in public debates. It seems as if EP elections have become more mobilizing again – but also more antagonistic.



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## **Appendix**

### ***A.1 Technical Details of the Survey***

*Geographical scope of the survey:* Austria, Germany, France, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

*Universe:* individuals residing in the area of study older than 18. Size and distribution of the sample: 1.567 interviews in Austria, 1.312 in Germany, 1.230 in France, 1.300 in Sweden, and 1.304 in the United Kingdom. The selection of respondents was based on socio-demographic variables (i.e. age and gender) stratified according to region (NUTS 2).

*Sampling error:* for a confidence level of 95.5% (as is usually adopted) and assuming the principles of simple random sampling, in the worst-case scenario of maximum uncertainty ( $p = q = 50\%$ ), the sampling error corresponding to the data on the total sample is approx.  $\pm 3$  percentage points.

*Method of collecting information:* online survey, using structured and pre-coded questions. The task was carried out by Respondi, using their databank of respondents. The questionnaire is available in German (Germany and Austria), French (France), Swedish (Sweden) and English (UK).

*Interview dates:* All interviews were conducted in the aftermath of the May 2019 EP elections, specifically: Austria (31/05/2019 – 24/06/2019), Germany (31/05/2019 – 12/06/2019), France (31/05/2019 – 12/06/2019), Sweden (03/05/2019 – 16/06/2019), United Kingdom (31/05/2019 – 12/06/2019).

## A.2 Survey Questions

Table A.1. Wording of questions used for Table 3

Issue	Question
Introduction	<i>We would like to ask you to position yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means that you are 'strongly against the statement' and 10 means that you are 'strongly in favour of the statement'. If your views are somewhere in between, you can choose any number that describes your position best.</i>
European Unification	European Unification has gone too far
EU authority over budget	The EU should have more authority over the EU Member States' economic and budgetary policies
EU strictness on rule violation	The EU should severely punish Member States that violate rules (e.g. EU deficit)
EU tax on its own	The EU should have the right to levy taxes on its own
EU security and defence	The EU should strengthen its security and defence policy
EU minimum wage	There should be a European Minimum Wage
EU should dissolve	The European Union should dissolve
Redistribution	Redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor
Homosexual rights	The legalization of same-sex marriages is a good thing
Immigration	Migration from non-European countries should be restricted as much as possible
Environment	Environmental protection should always take priority even at the cost of economic growth

Table A.2. Wording of questions used for Figure 2

Variable	Question
Left-Right Scale	In politics people sometimes talk of 'left' and 'right'. Using the scale below, where would you place yourself, where 0 means 'extreme left' and 10 means 'extreme right'?
Pro/Anti-EU	In European politics people sometimes talk of being 'pro-EU' and 'anti-EU'. Using the scale below, where would you place yourself, where 0 means completely 'anti-EU' and 10 means completely 'pro-EU'?

### A.3 Additional Figures and Tables

Table A.3. Placement of lead candidates by country and EP group voted for in the EP 2019 elections

Pct. Correct Answers	Austria			Germany			France			Sweden			United Kingdom		
	Voted for party?			Voted for party?			Voted for party?			Voted for party?			Voted for party?		
	No	Yes	Dif.	No	Yes	Dif.	No	Yes	Dif.	No	Yes	Dif.	No	Yes	Dif.
EPP: Manfred WEBER	27.52	44.71	-17.19	32.43	41.95	.52	4.65	7.35	-2.7	7.27	6.58	0.69	No EPP party		
PES: Frans TIMMERMANS	20.14	31.78	-11.64	26.69	40.15	.46	2.22	6.56	-4.34	11.6	6.91	4.69	2.01	1.79	0.22
EGP: Ska KELLER	9.18	21.86	-12.68	20.22	27.85	.63	3.2	6.67	-3.47	7.27	13.89	-6.62	2.11	1.43	0.68
ALDE: Margrethe VESTAGER	9.68	18.02	-8.34	20.33	32.76	.43	2.21	7.37	-5.16	7.51	7.75	-0.24	1.51	4.42	-2.91
EL: Nico CUÉ	No EL party			10.81	12.5	.69	3.36	7.32	-3.96	6.56	13.68	-7.12	No EL party		
ACRE: Jan ZAHRADIL	No ACRE party			No ACRE party			No ACRE party			6.3	10.13	-3.83	2.15	0	2.15
	16.63	29.09	-12.46	22.10	31.04	8.95	3.13	7.05	-3.93	7.75	9.82	-2.07	1.95	1.95	0.03

Notes: Categories below 5 observations in red. Groups include the following parties:

EPP: ÖVP (AT), CDU/CSU (DE), Les Republicans (FR), Moderate Party and Christian Democrats (SE).

PES: SPÖ (AT), SPD (DE), PS (FR), SAP (SE), Labour (UK)

EGP: Grüne (AT), Bündis/Die Grünen (DE), Veerts (FR), Green Party (SE), Greens (UK).

ALDE: NEOS (AT), FPD (DE), REM (FR), Liberals and Center Party (SE), LibDem (UK).

EL: Linke (DE), La France Insoumise (FR), Left Party (SE).

ACRE: Sweden Democrats (SE), Conservatives (UK). Note that neither FPÖ, nor AfD or the FN are together in the ACRE party group.

**Table A.4.** The structure of voters' issue positions in Austria

Issue	Factor 1: <i>EU–Authority</i>	Factor 2: <i>Demarcation– Integration</i>	Factor 3: <i>New Socio– Ecologic</i>	Uniqueness
European Unification		0.813		0.302
EU authority over budget	0.725			0.397
EU strictness on rule violation	0.662			0.505
EU tax on its own	0.674			0.464
EU security and defence	0.736			0.436
EU minimum wage	0.320		0.580	0.556
EU should dissolve	-0.355	0.695		0.388
Redistribution			0.792	0.370
Homosexual rights		-0.471	0.476	0.551
Immigration		0.808		0.337
Environment			0.652	0.564

*Note:* Blanks represent  $\text{abs}(\text{loading}) < .3$ . Factors with Eigenvalue  $> 1$ . Rotated factor loadings (pattern matrix) and unique variances. Phrasing of the questions for each variable can be found in section A.2 in the appendix, table A.2.

**Table A.5.** The structure of voters' issue positions in Germany

Issue	Factor 1: <i>EU–Authority</i>	Factor 2: <i>Demarcation– Integration</i>	Factor 3: <i>New Socio– Ecologic</i>	Uniqueness
European Unification		0.831		0.276
EU authority over budget	0.686			0.400
EU strictness on rule violation	0.709			0.474
EU tax on its own	0.572			0.522
EU security and defence	0.753			0.424
EU minimum wage			0.616	0.532
EU should dissolve	-0.303	0.732		0.363
Redistribution			0.802	0.353
Homosexual rights		-0.537	0.379	0.568
Immigration		0.730		0.442
Environment			0.635	0.536

*Note:* Blanks represent  $\text{abs}(\text{loading}) < .3$ . Factors with Eigenvalue  $> 1$ . Rotated factor loadings (pattern matrix) and unique variances. Phrasing of the questions for each variable can be found in section A.2 in the appendix, table A.2.

**Table A.6.** The structure of voters' issue positions in France

Issue	Factor 1: <i>EU–Authority</i>	Factor 2: <i>Demarcation– Integration</i>	Factor 3: <i>New Socio– Ecologic</i>	Uniqueness
European Unification		0.771		0.379
EU authority over budget	0.839			0.269
EU strictness on rule violation	0.793			0.371
EU tax on its own	0.676			0.513
EU security and defence	0.564	0.377		0.515
EU minimum wage	0.347		0.575	0.549
EU should dissolve		0.705		0.448
Redistribution			0.758	0.399
Homosexual rights		–0.425	0.487	0.578
Immigration		0.769		0.398
Environment			0.670	0.525

*Note:* Blanks represent  $\text{abs}(\text{loading}) < .3$ . Factors with  $\text{Eigenvalue} > 1$ . Rotated factor loadings (pattern matrix) and unique variances. Phrasing of the questions for each variable can be found in section A.2 in the appendix, table A.2.

**Table A.7.** The structure of voters' issue positions in Sweden

Issue	Factor 1: <i>EU–Authority</i>	Factor 2: <i>Demarcation– Integration</i>	Factor 3: <i>New Socio– Ecologic</i>	Uniqueness
European Unification		0.797		0.313
EU authority over budget	0.725			0.418
EU strictness on rule violation	0.497			0.651
EU tax on its own	0.723			0.451
EU security and defence	0.573		–0.439	0.434
EU minimum wage	0.610		0.372	0.482
EU should dissolve		0.831		0.284
Redistribution			0.822	0.315
Homosexual rights		–0.598	0.333	0.531
Immigration		0.483	–0.526	0.489
Environment			0.641	0.510

*Note:* Blanks represent  $\text{abs}(\text{loading}) < .3$ . Factors with  $\text{Eigenvalue} > 1$ . Rotated factor loadings (pattern matrix) and unique variances. Phrasing of the questions for each variable can be found in section A.2 in the appendix, table A.2.



*Table A.8.* The structure of voters' issue positions in UK

Issue	Factor 1: <i>EU-Authority</i>	Factor 2: <i>Demarcation- Integration</i>	Factor 3: <i>New Socio- Ecologic</i>	Uniqueness
European Unification		0.839		0.254
EU authority over budget	0.762			0.343
EU strictness on rule violation	0.721			0.458
EU tax on its own	0.769			0.351
EU security and defence	0.644			0.522
EU minimum wage	0.523		0.525	0.440
EU should dissolve		0.841		0.242
Redistribution			0.753	0.418
Homosexual rights		-0.376	0.476	0.631
Immigration		0.760		0.407
Environment			0.734	0.437

*Note:* Blanks represent  $\text{abs}(\text{loading}) < .3$ . Factors with Eigenvalue  $> 1$ . Rotated factor loadings (pattern matrix) and unique variances. Phrasing of the questions for each variable can be found in section A.2 in the appendix, table A.2.